

Text: Exod. 26:15-30, 36:20-34

Title: "Boards and bars: the walls of God's dwelling-place"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: We hear a lot today about the importance of building a wall. The last "From the Pulpit" article in the New Boston Beacon was about that. The pastor who wrote that article seemed to advocate for an open boarder immigration policy by pointing out correctly that after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph became refugees in Egypt while fleeing Herod's slaughter of infants in Bethlehem.

I agree with that article when it comes to those who flee countries due to the oppression of their governments. Refugees need care, and we should be a nation that does that for them. But that really is a mischaracterization of the issue we have on our hands as a nation on our southern border. Instead, what we have going on there is really a human trafficking problem that asks the question of whether our nation can survive if it has no way to distinguish its inside from its outside. And so many see the need for a wall.

In our study of the tabernacle, we have come to the instructions for its construction that give God's house an inside and an outside, the boards and the bars that form the walls of God's house. God's house has an inside and an outside. These walls were to be ten cubits high and form a rectangular structure that was ten cubits wide and thirty cubits long.

Some Bible scholars believe that the word translated in our text as *boards* was actually a wood frame. Archeological evidence supports the existence of portable structures comprised of wood frames in the ancient world long before the days of Exodus. In addition, understanding these boards as

wood frames helps us understand why the inner curtain was wide enough to be draped across not only the roof of the tabernacle, but also down its outer sides. The beauty of these side sections of the inner curtain would not be visible from the inside if these were solid boards. Nor would they have been visible from the outside due to the longer goats' hair tarp. But the side sections of the beautiful inner curtain of the tabernacle would be visible from the inside, if its walls were wood frames that exposed the curtain.

Clearly, God's house has an inside and an outside. You may remember from our study of the curtains that our New Testaments encourage us to see two corresponding realities that are a part of our lives in our era as we study the tabernacle. It turns out that these two entities also have an inside and an outside.

First, we need to see Jesus Christ in the tabernacle. The tabernacle is God's dwelling place, and Jesus is God's Son who dwells among us. John 1:14: "And the Word [Jesus] was made flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Col. 2:9, "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Jesus has an inside and an outside. We must be in Christ to be saved.

In addition, our New Testaments tell us that Jesus's church today is the body of Christ. Jesus's church is invisible, a matter of the heart of believers. His church becomes visible in the world today through local churches, one of which we are, and Paul instructs local churches in 1 Tim. 3:15 (and other passages) to think of their local church assembly as God's house: "These things I write unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of

God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." These grounds are the sockets of silver we read about in our passage this morning. Paul is thinking about the correspondence between the local church and the tabernacle of our passage.

So, Jesus has an inside and an outside, and local churches have an inside and an outside. Our New Testaments tell us that it is a great salvation blessing to be in Christ. To be outside of Christ is to be eternally lost in our sin and guilt. Eph. 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [things] in Christ." Verse 12 tells us how this came to be and why: "That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ." Have you trusted in Christ for salvation from your sins this morning? If so, you are in Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly things in Him.

And our local church has an inside and an outside as well. As we read the beginnings of the history of the church in the book of Acts, we know that the church at Jerusalem began with 120 names (1:15). And then as sinners were saved and baptized, Luke reports that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

Other names became known along with the original 120 as members of the church of Jerusalem. As God mightily worked in that church, people had to decide whether they were in or out, added or subtracted. There was no middle ground: "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:13-14). *Join* there refers to a casual association. To be *added* is to be a member on the inside.

Paul speaks of the importance of the local church's inside and outside in 1 Corinthians 5, because part of our responsibility to one another on the inside is to hold each other accountable. The inside of a local church is a place where we find believers who are submitting to local church authority. Paul explains: "For what have I to do to judge them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (vv. 12-13).

The boards and bars of the tabernacle teach us that Jesus has an inside and an outside, and His churches have an inside and an outside. In both cases, the walls of the tabernacle invite us to be saved in Christ and added to His church. They do so in three ways.

I. The materials of the walls invite us to be saved and added (vv. 15-25).

Illustration: I learned this past week about an unwritten building policy in London that the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral must always be visible along certain corridors throughout the city. This means that when developers propose a new skyscraper, it is not allowed to block the view of the dome along those corridors. The dome of the cathedral is to remain the centerpiece of London's architectural landscape.

Application: Jesus Christ is centerpiece of the tabernacle's architecture. The gold and shittim wood of the boards and bars teach us this. We have seen the gold and the shittim wood before in our study of the ark of the covenant and the table of shewbread. You may remember that gold refers to the deity of Jesus Christ, that He is perfect God. And the durable shittim or acacia wood refers to the incorruptible humanity of Jesus Christ as perfect man.

The gold and the wood make one thing, in this case wood frames or bars for the walls of the tabernacle. And the two natures of Christ are indivisible in one person. In addition, the gold and wood do not mix but remain distinct, and so the dual nature of our Savior is never confused or mixed.

And what was the purpose for the Son of God to become a man? Why did God do the miracle of the incarnation? Jesus explained that purpose this way: “For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25).

We see that purpose illustrated in the silver sockets or groundings used as the foundation for the walls of the tabernacle (v. 19). One author explained that each of these sockets weighed around 125 lbs, so that the total amount of silver required was five and a half tons [Stephen Olford, *The Tabernacle: Camping with God*, 63]. He notes that all of the silver used in the tabernacle symbolized redemption, because silver was used as atonement money. The “shekel of the sanctuary” was a piece of silver given to the Lord.

Here God designs the tabernacle to include a weighty ransom as the foundation for everything. The weighty ransom that Jesus paid is the foundation of the truth that God’s house has an inside and an outside. Those whom He has ransomed with the gift of His life for their sins are on the inside. Those who have no need of that gift remain without. Jesus’s local churches are for the ransomed. And as ransomed, we recognize that we were bought with a price and are not our own. Are you on the inside or on the outside of this blessing? The materials of the walls invite us to be saved and added.

II. The gold rings of the walls invite us to be saved and added (vv. 26-30).

Illustration: Have you ever noticed how that often a certain person is the glue that holds things together for a group of people? I realized that especially when my Mom became sick and passed away. Since then, family Christmas celebrations have not been the same. Mom was the glue that held those times of family fellowship together, and without her they kind of fell apart a bit.

Application: When it comes to rearing up the tabernacle, the golden rings that hold the bars that support the walls are the key to holding everything together. You will notice that the rings are pure gold, lacking the shittim wood. For this reason I see deity without humanity, in this case the Holy Spirit, whose ministry was essential to the tabernacling that Jesus did among men, and whose ministry is critical to our survival as a local church. The Holy Spirit is the person that held everything together in the ministry of Christ and only He can do so in our local church ministry.

You may remember that after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Matt. 3:16). From that time on, Jesus was anointed for His Messianic ministry as the Christ. *Messiah* and *Christ* mean *Anointed One*. Kings, priests, and prophets were anointed ones in the Old Testament, meaning that they were ordained for ministry with the anointing oil, which represented the Holy Spirit. Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit as He faithfully executed His assigned task to be our King, Priest, and Prophet.

And certainly as the house of God on earth today, our local church shall be held together and blessed to the degree that the Holy Spirit is pleased to do so. Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went

down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Paul warns us as a church not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. We do so when we put first our human spirit rather than God's Holy Spirit. He is grieved when we obey ourselves instead of Him. Are we on the inside or the outside of the Holy Spirit's blessing on our lives? Do we enjoy the Spirit of unity in the bond of peace?

III. The command of God to build the walls commands us to be saved and added.

Application: Over and over again in our passage, and in all the passages we have read about the tabernacle together, we find the command of God: "You shall make." It occurs 52 times by my count in these chapters on the tabernacle. I have noted before that this section of Exodus has instructions for the tabernacle in the first chapters, and then the the last chapters record how these instructions were followed exactly. "You shall make" was a command carefully followed by Moses, when it came to the worship of God.

God's command "You shall make" comes to us today. It is not up to us to literally make Christ and His church, but we must make them out to be what they truly are. We must value them correctly. When Jesus's enemies accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, He challenged them to make Him out to be who He truly is: "And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:32-22).

Conclusion: Here too we have the Lord's command - "you shall make." Make the tree and its fruit good or evil. What will we make of Jesus Christ? Will we say He is a good tree with good fruit, or like His enemies will we say that He is corrupt with corrupt fruit? There is no middle ground.

And what shall we make of our local church? Do we value local church membership as good or evil? Do we find the fruit of local church ministry to be good, or do we treat it as something evil?

The walls of the tabernacle tell us that the house of God has an inside and an outside. They invite us to be saved in Christ and added into a good local church. Will you come in or remain content to stay without?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*